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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to increase Swedish preschool children's understanding of aspects of commercial enterprise, particularly those of "the shop," by introducing a specific didactic approach to preschool education. Of particular interest were two aspects of the shop: advertising and the principle of trade. A total of 77 children up to 7 years of age worked in 4 groups for 2 to 3 weeks on the theme of "the shop." Groups A and B were instructed in line with the assumptions that: (1) if the teacher knows how children think about the content to be taught, it should be easier for the teacher to develop the children's understanding; (2) student reflection on teacher-made situations and problems leads to understanding; and (3) children would have to reflect on content, structure, and their learning if the approach were to succeed. Teachers of groups A and B planned and used situations, problems, and questions which were supposed to increase their students' understanding. Comparison groups C and D worked out the instructional theme individually. In a manner similar to that of the Piagetian clinical interview, children were interviewed three times about the shop theme. Findings, which favored the didactic approach, indicated that comparison and treatment groups differed markedly in their understanding of advertising and the function of money in the shop. (RH)

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AN APPROACH TO TEACHING YOUNG CHILDREN ABOUT "THE SHOP"

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The view of learning

According to Marton (1988) there are three aspects to learning: skills, knowledge and understanding. Skills refers to how we act, and knowledge refers to what we know about phenomena that are already discerned and already apprehended one way or another. Understanding, on the other hand, refers to the way in which the phenomena are discerned and apprehended. Let us interpret what these three aspects mean in relation to the topic of "Traffic" in preschool. To teach children "Traffic" from the view of skills means to work with strategies, like practicing where the safest place to cross the street is in their neighbourhood, that one ought to look twice in one direction before crossing, and so on. To teach "Traffic" from the view of knowledge means to teach children roadsigns, right and left, that one is supposed to walk in the opposite direction to traffic when there is no pavement, relevant vocabulary, etc. Finally, to teach "Traffic" from the perspective of understanding means to create opportunities where the child conceptualizes traffic as traffic, that is, as a system of movement in which there have to be rules in order for it to function. It is this third perspective, to develop understanding, which is in focus in the study to be presented.

The content of the study

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The reasons why the theme of "The shop" was chosen in trying to develop didactics in preschool education, are firstly, that it is a common topic in preschool, but also, that the study by Jahoda (1979) showed that most children in the early grades in school had no idea about the function of money in the shop. Many children did not know that the shop had to pay for the articles sold there. And when they began to realize that the shop had to pay, children first thought the money came from somewhere else. Children conceptualized two parallel economic systems, that is, customer-articles and shop-supplier. How these two systems of selling and buying articles was integrated did not become clear to children until around 11 or 12 years of age.

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Furth (1980) has interviewed 195 children between 5 and 11 years of age in order to describe children's understanding of society as a system, that is, the total life in a society related to its institutions, rules and users, its service and production, its roles and symbols. According to children's thinking about "selling and buying", he says that younger children do not have any understanding of why articles have to be paid for. At the next level of development, children understand that articles have to be paid for, but not that the shop owner has to do so. Later, children begin to realize that there is a relation between the customer's money and the money which the shop has to pay for the articles delivered.

The theme of "The shop" was also used by Pramling (1988a) in an earlier study, as a common content in three preshools where one of the teachers worked with developing children's conceptions of their own learning by thematizing and problematizing the aspect of learning while they dealt with the theme of "The shop". The content was structured from the customer's and the shop's perspective. Apart from the results about children's awareness of their own learning, qualitatively different ways of thinking about the functions of money in the shop and the role of advertising were found, among other things. Most 5 to 6 year olds knew how to shop (they could find articles and the price tickets, they knew that money has to be given to the shop assistant, etc).

The two aspects of the shop as a system which will be dealt with here are advertising and the principle of trade. The children were asked the question: "Have you ever heard about an advertisement? Well, tell me about it!" The qualitatively different ways in which children thought about advertising were: as a <u>sign</u> (a picture of something, that is, the form of the advertisment), as <u>information</u> (whether it is wrong or right, for example, information about a bargain price, about new articles), or finally, as a <u>function</u> (which means that children talk about the way the shop tries to entice people to buy).

Children's conceptions of the principle of trade was found out by asking children: "What happens to the money you give to the shop assistant for articles you bought?" This question was followed up by asking what the shop used the money for. The qualitatively different ideas children expressed were: that the money was <u>kept</u> somewhere (in the till or safe), that <u>other customers got the money back</u> (if one does not get money back, one has

nothing to spend later). These two conceptions are expressions of what the child has seen, but the act of paying is just a ritual. Another idea is that someone else gets the money (the shop assistent, the owner of the shop, the local authority for building schools, or people in poor countries where they are starving). A couple of children expressed the idea that money could be used only once (a truck takes the money to a factory where they make new money out of it). Finally, some children have the idea that the money is used for costs (when the shop runs out of milk, for example, they will use it to buy fresh milk).

All these conceptions of advertising and the principle of trade were found among these children, but only one or two children in each group held the most advanced conception about the function of advertising and that the money is used for the shop's costs. Most children in the previous study (Pramling, 1986) still held the same conceptions about the shop after being taught about it.

It seems as though some aspects of the shop's function are so obvious that every child of around 5 and 6 years knows everything about how to shop (to be a customer). On the other hand, to understand how the shop functions seems to be very difficult, at least with the traditional teaching methods used in this study (Pramling, op cit). Berti and Bombi (1988) studied children's constructions of economics and show some differences in different cultures. They claim that children's lack of understanding at a level at which they ought to be capable, can be due to the fact that children are kept out of economics in many families and cultures.

What about the principle of trade when children are playing? Do children not understand the principle in situations which do not involve money? One day I happened to see a group of children swapping stamps, as I thought. But on studying them carefully I realized that they were not swapping, but either they begged them or gave them away. But even after giving them away, it seemed that they still owned them. A child came back and asked: "Can I give away the Japanese stamp I got from you?" "No": said the other child, but then changed her mind and asked: "Who are you going to give it to?" She was satisfied by the other child's reply and said : "Well, if Catarina promises not to give it away again, she can have it!" It was obvious that the children had no understanding of principle of exchange at all.

Aim and assumptions

The aim of the present study was to try to develop children's understanding of particular aspects of the shop, by introducing a specific didactic approach in preschool education. (Preschool in Sweden is up to 7, so there is an overlap between British primary school and Swedish preschool). Differences in teaching the theme of "The shop" in four preschools, (with children 5 to 6 years of age) and the outcome in terms of children's understanding will be described. Although one cannot claim absolute connections between teaching and learning in any way, one can describe carefully the experiences children have and study what possible understanding can take place. The assumption was that if a teacher knows about how children think about the content which is to be taught, then it should be easier for the teacher to develop the children's understanding. The way of teaching which was proposed to develop the children's conceptions was that of creating everyday situations (and problems) around which the children would have to think and reflect, or in other words, teaching based on the belief that reflection leads to understanding. But children had to reflect on three levels of generality: about the content, about the structure (connections for understanding) and about their own learning. They have to reflect on the content with a vertical approach, oscillating between different levels of generality.

It has to be mentioned that this study is part of a larger project (running for the whole school year) which aims to study relations between metacognition and cognition, which in this case is to study if children are better prepared for learning the more aware they are about their own learning (Pramling, 1988b). However, I choose to ignore this aspect, awareness of their own learning, here and concentrate on the didactic approach. It is important to see the present study as a feasability study and not as a cause-effect study. The design is "experimental - descriptive", with its focus on describing children's learning in the light of teaching.

There is also a metacognitive aspect in that the teacher once in a while changes perspective and focuses the children's attention on to how they are thinking in different ways about the topic they are dealing with. In this respect the content is metacognitively taught.

Method and subjects

Four groups of preschoolers (in total 77 childen) worked for 2 to 3 weeks on the theme of "The shop". Groups A and B are the two experiment groups where the project leader and the teachers plan together on the assumptions described earlier. These teachers were given all the information about children's conceptions of the content to be taught, as found from the first interview. Situations, problems and questions which were supposed to influence their understanding were planned. Groups C and D are comparison groups, and worked out the theme in their own ways. All four preschools are located in middle-class areas. Children's conceptions of their own learning was examined at the beginning of the school year, and showed no differences between the groups.

Children have been interviewed three times about the shop theme. The interviews are similar to the Piagetian clinical interview, where children's answers have to be followed and developed as far as it is possible (Piaget, 1975). The interviews have been transcribed verbatim and form the basis of analysis with the aim of first finding similarities and differences in children's thinking, and then describing qualitatively different conceptions (Marton, 1981). The first interview was carried out before the theme was started. Unfortunately, group D was not interviewed since they had already started the theme when the first interview was planned to take place, due to a misunderstanding between the teacher and the project leader. The second interview was carried out a week after the theme was completed, and the third one three months later.

Characterisation of the teaching

Preschools A and B have the same goal, namely to develop situations where the structure of the required conceptions are clearly illustrated and where children have to reflect. A few situations will illuminate this principle. For example, when they were building a shop to play in, the teacher told the children to throw away the articles from the shop when they had played with them, into the waste paper basket in her office. After a while the shelves became empty and the children began to complain that there was nothing left to buy. The teacher then took up the discussion about what happens in a real shop. They decided together that new articles are delivered regularly by a man in a big truck. They discussed when money changed hands in order to pay

for the articles. They also discussed and reflected together about where the big trucks came from, and so on. The discussion ended with the teacher introducing a new role into the game, namely a truck driver, who drove his truck from the teacher's office (now changed into a factory), and of course, he is very keen to get money from the shop assistant for the articles he has delivered to the shop. This role became very popular, and assumed high status.

They also worked on telling stories about different pictures with reference to money transformation. They made up a story about a farmer and what he grew, how the farmer's products were sold, what happened at the factory, how the final product was sold to the shop, and how families came and bought it at a much higher price than the farmer was once paid. They also created their own stories in books, which were later compared with focus on their different ways of thinking.

Advertising was taken up one day when two children were sitting alone in the shop, in the role of shop assistants. The teacher asked them what they could do to get customers to came to the shop. The children suggested shouting, "Come and buy!", but still no-one came. The teacher took up the question of advertising, and the children made drawings to give to the other children. When they were about to distribute these, the teacher told them to tell the others that the shop was offering surprises that day. She then took out a cake from the freezer and put it in the micro-wave oven to defrost and mixed a bottle of juice. In a few minutes every child was shopping! Before children left the preschool for the day, the teacher started a discussion about advertising by asking why everybody played shop today. The reason was of course, that they got cake and juice. "Does this happen in a real shop too?" Children had a lot of ideas about the question. They knew that they had been given ballons, food, sweets and suchlike in shops.

When they were in the real shop the teacher took down two boxes of cereal, one with coloured pictures on it and one rather plain. She then asked the children which one they would buy. Everybody pointed at the colourful box. "Why would you buy that one?" she asked. Children gave their ideas, like, "It tastes better", or "There are small pictures inside the box", etc. After the children had given their ideas, the teacher said, "I would have bought the other one, why do you think I would?" Again children come up with ideas like, "You like it better", "You have never tasted the other one", "Maybe

that one is less expensive". The teacher then bought the two boxes and took them with her to preschool where the children had to taste the two cereals without knowing which box they came from. In this way it became obvious for the children how they had been cheated by the pictures on the box.

On another occasion the teacher found a honey container which looked like a bear. She asked them if they knew what it was. They all did! "But why is the honey in a bear?" asked the teacher. "Because, Winnie the Pooh likes honey", said someone. "But is he the one who's going to buy and eat this honey, or who wants it?" They had no idea. The teacher then continued, "I think your fathers want a bear like this on the breakfast table in the morning". Everybody laughed, and of course they realized that it was they themselves who wanted the bear filled with honey.

A lot of similar situations were created by the teacher, sometimes on her own initiative and sometimes then she caught a situation in which children were involved and where she could get them to reflect for understanding. It was a continuing dialogue and called for co-operation between the teacher and children and between the children themselves. Once in a while she asked them about their own learning, for instance, "Why have we built a shop?, "Why did we go to the shop yesterday?", and "Why do we talk about advertising?" In other words, "what, how and why are we doing certain activities?"

Teacher C could be characterized as someone looking at children in terms of maturity, which means that the children did a lot of activities, but there was no component of reflection. Her idea was that by practicing different skills, like playing in the shop in their own ways, or by visiting the real shop, the children who were mature enough would gain an insight all by themselves. The children decided what to talk about during discussion time and when she tried to teach them about advertising or the principle of trade she put relevant questions to the whole group. It was the child who already knew the answers that responded, and the teacher thought that if someone is mature enough to understand something they will learn by naming it. The teacher's perspective is that concrete activities will lead to children learning about the shop.

Teacher D chose to have small "lectures" during discussion time for which she was very well prepared. She knew all the facts about the shop, and she

tried to communicate them by telling them to the children. Her "lectures" were very extended and advanced (for example she took up the meaning of import and export). This teaching represented traditional "school teaching", where the teacher tried to mediate her own knowledge to the children. The reason for playing shop was, from this teacher's perspective, to develop the meaning of the information she had given them earlier.

Results

The qualitatively different ways of thinking about advertising and the principle of trade described earlier can now be utilized for categorising the children's conceptions. In Table 1 we can see the way children's conceptions of advertising came to expression in the three different interviews. On the first occasion A and B's conceptions are similar, that is, one fourth of the children already had the most advanced idea of advertisement, while only one child in group C held this conception. The greatest change in the second interview (when the theme was finished) is in group A where all but one child had developed the idea of the function of advertising. The change in groups B and C is similar. Whatever the starting point was in group D, these children are the ones who reached the least developed stage of understanding.

Insert table 1 about here

For the third interview, the pattern is the same in group A. A little less than half of the children in group B and C understood the function of advertisement as trying to sell, while only one third of the D group's children had made this insight. The categorisation is hierarchical, which means that a child is only categorized in the most advanced category he or she gave expression to.

What about children's conceptions of the principle of trade, which according to Jahoda (1979) is not to be seen in children of this age? The conceptions described earlier are utilized here as well for categorisation of children's ideas. However, the three categories, "money kept", "other customers get money back" and "someone gets the money", are reduced to "input to the shop", that is, the money goes from the customers to the shop. In the

category of "costs" children conceptualize that the money is transferred to the deliverer.

In Table 2 we can see the similarities and differences between the groups. There are a few children in groups A and B who even in the first interview expressed the idea that the money is handed to the deliverer by the shop assistant, but no-one in group C. At the second interview the greatest change is in groups A and B, where a little more (A) or a little fewer (B) than half of the children expressed the most advanced conception. A few children in group C did so, and one in group D. One third of the children in group D did not know, although they had been taught about it. By the third interview, some children in all groups had developed their understanding of the function of the money further. There were now three quarters of the children in group A who had developed this conception, and half of the children in group B, while there were only one or two individuals in groups C and D.

Insert table 2 about here

The children in group A developed most, and after that group B. Group C developed very little and it is difficult to say anything about group D because of the lack of a first interview and because 4 children were missing from the third interview.

What it is possible to assert is that the difference between the two "experimental groups" (A and B) on one hand, and the two "comparison groups" (C and D) is obvious in both the aspects, advertisment and the function of money in the shop. It is the tendency rather than the absolute figures which is of interest when discussing different approaches to learning.

The comment has to be made that a few children in groups A and B held the most advanced level of understanding from the outset. Since no differences were found between the children's thinking at the beginning of the year (see Pramling, 1988b), it could very well be that these children already focussed on looking for connections, since they had been involved in this didactic approach for about six months when they started to deal with this new theme.

Discussion

The didactic approach being argued for here is that teaching in preschool ought to be a question of developing the child's understanding of the world around him or her. Here it was done by shifting between different levels of generality and by causing the child to reflect on his or her own way of thinking. Understanding in the perspective described here is the foundation for later learning of strategies or facts (Smith, 1986). The didactic consequences for the teacher will be to plan themes around goals of possible understanding which a child can develop by working with that particular content. After then having found children's conceptions from earlier experiences and knowledge (which could be done through interviews, group-discussions, making drawings, dramatic activities, problem-solving, playing etc), the teacher knows what is left to work on with the children. In other words, to what extent the children's conceptions differ from those which the teacher is striving for. The next step in the process will be to plan situations, events, experiences, etc on which the children can reflect. These situations must illustrate the internal structure of the phenomena as a whole, which for example can be done by working with analogies (Doverborg & Pramling, 1988). But children's reflection is the most important part. If we want to develop children's understanding of the world around them, they have to think!

The approach is based neither on concrete manipulation with objects only, nor on theoretical notions mediated by the teacher, Instead, the approach is based on children's conceptions of the phenomena worked on, which is something other than concrete acting or the subject-matter. As we have seen, the teaching begins with children's thinking of the shop and the aspects the teacher wants them to learn about. Learning here means to change the child's way of thinking from one level to a more advanced level (Pramling, 1983). There is an enormous potential for utilizing children's lived experiences in teaching. But in order to work with a starting point in children's experiences, it is not enough for the teacher to know in an objective way what experiences the child has, it would not help the teacher at all to know that the child goes shopping with her mother every week or that a child lives next to a shop, when she plans the theme. But finding out what consequences these experiences have for the child's way of thinking about the theme ought to help.

To utilize the potential of children's different ways of thinking means paying attention to the fact that they think in qualitatively different ways, without judging their merits. Easly and Stake's study (1984) on "Problem-solving via dialogue", is an excellent example of this. The idea is that each child solves the problem first by themselves. A problem within mathematics for 6 year olds, might be, for example, to divide 10 cookies between 3 children. They solve the problem by drawing it on a piece of paper. The teacher then takes all the different ways of solving the problem that she finds among their solutions, and asks children to come up to the black-board, to explain and show how the problem is solved. She never says that something is right or wrong, but "Just another way of solving the problem". The idea behind this is that the children should realize in the long run what a better solution is, and get the message that the important thing is to think and reflect, since there can often be many ways of solving the problem (Doverborg & Pramling, 1987). According to Gordon (1988), problem-solving is an important aspect of education in Japan. Gordon claims that problems in Japanese schools are often very advanced. But since the children are aware that these problems are at a level far byond their capability, they also know that it is the effort that counts rather than the result.

Elkind (1988) says that it is not what you put into the child, but what the child brings to the task of learning that is critical for education. He also believes that we have to change our paradigm and advocate educational practice that sees the teacher as a learner alongside the child, rather than as a simple conduit of information. Children need to learn how to learn instead of learning specific information, which in any case might be inadequate by the time the child needs the information in the future (Pramling, 1989).

One can, of course, question the importance of developing the idea of trade, and say that this is something children will understand sooner or later. But one can also look at it as Professor Katz (1945) did, when he described children's thinking about economics, and pointed out that not even all adults have grasped the fact that there is no value as such in a coin or note, which is the principle of trade!

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Table 1. Children's conceptions of advertisement

	Interview											
	1				2				3			
Preschool	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Do not know	3	3	11	-	-	2	3	7	-	2	2	3
Sign	8	5	4	-	-	2	5	7	-	1	7	5
Information	2	7	2	-	1	9	2	1	1	9	2	2
Function	5	5	1	-	18	7	7	4	18	8	8	5
Number	18	20	19	-	19	20	17	19	19	20	19	15

Table 2. The function of money

	Interview											
Preschool	1				2				3			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Input	10	17	16	-	7	11	12	13	4	10	16	12
Costs	5	2	-	-	13	9	2	1	15	10	1	2
Do not know	3	1	3	-	-	-	3	5	-	-	3	1
Number	18	20	19	-	19	20	17	19	19	20	19	15

Abstract

We know a lot today about how children learn, but teaching still remains the same for a lot of children. In this article an approach to learning is developed in relation to young children's learning about "The shop" in 2 preschool groups, and it is compared with 2 groups with traditional teaching. In total, 77 children aged 5 to 6 years and their teachers participated. The children were interviewed 3 times about "The shop": before the teaching started, immediately after and finally 3 months later. The results show that children from the "experimental groups" developed their understanding of certain aspects of the theme to a far greater extent than children from other groups. The didactic approach is based on relating to children's lived experiences in order to change their understanding of some aspects of the world around them.